Avant-Gardism in 1990s Indonesia and Timor-Leste: defying the repression of the Indonesian New Order regime*

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Abstract

With this paper, I propose to frame certain contemporary art practices from 1990s Indonesia and Timor-Leste as avant-garde. The focus resides on a selection of artworks made during the repressive New Order regime of General Suharto (1967-1998). These avant-garde works, which are born out of the political conjecture, have as their most striking feature the presence of fragments of traditional arts. I have suggested terming the conflation of traditional arts and the discourses of the contemporary as the 'Third Avant-garde'. These practices emerged mostly in the 1990s, the quasi-inaugural decade for the international showcase of 'non-Western' art. Probably due to reception problems, since the 2000s these artworks were generally regarded and theorized within the spectrum of political art, an aspect that relegated the presence of traditional arts to a secondary realm, of a lesser importance. And while I concur that these works constitute extremely political and politicized practices, I argue that it is precisely the use of traditional arts that makes them so. This is an aspect that remains undertheorized in regards to the region's 'political art': the primacy of "traditional arts".

Keywords

Avant-garde; New Order regime; Southeast Asia; Tradition; Contemporary.

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Primacy of content

It is a recurrent practice, especially within curatorial work, to frame works conceptually. Curators acts as mediators between the artist and the public, and frequently assume the position of translators, so that the works reach the desired audience(s). This conduct stems mainly from two reasons: firstly, unprepared audiences, that may be foreign to the artist and thus may not be familiar with the context of the artworks production (in some cases, these audiences are not foreign to the artist, but are at unease with conceptual art). Secondly, because of artists' use of extremely localized codes, such as traditions and idioms within artworks. The first possibility is the most common, as in many cases, the curator is him/herself foreign to these locations and thus lacks the ability to analyze local aspects, especially idiomatic ones, present in contemporary artworks. Nevertheless, the curator's mediator role is of vital importance, as it may resolve some inherent shortcomings of conceptual art. But his attention based on the primacy of content (over form) has meant that local codes are regarded as performing a supporting role for conceptual works.

From here, originates the fact that art produced in several locations, including Southeast Asia, has frequently been framed as 'political art'. While political art in a broad sense may indicate a tendency for social commentary that the region has been renowned for since the debut of modernity, this has meant that, when examining contemporary works, the regard has primarily focused on content, and form has been kept outside of the analysis. Thus, many artworks, such as Indonesian artist FX Harsono's *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) [Fig. 1] have been theorized as political works. This is especially evident in the writing by Australian art historians Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio published in *Asian Art Now* (Chiu and Genocchio, 2010, pp. 78–79) where they maintained Australian art historian Caroline Turner's 2005 interpretation (Turner, 2005). And while theirs is a correct analysis, if we regard the work from the viewpoint of its materiality, then its primal feature becomes the Panji mask, an important symbol from traditional Javanese tales that were adapted to shadow theater performances.

It seems that the constant regard of the traditional as subservient to the conceptual derives from a Western mindset and mode of making theory that separates 'art' from 'traditional art'. This is what this text aims to address: that when looking at the artwork, the primacy of form is evident.

What do we see?

When looking at two installation works from the region, *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) by Harsono, and *Silence at What Price?* (1996) [Fig. 2] by Timorese artist Maria Madeira, some aspects can immediately be put forward: firstly, these two works were made in mid-1990s Indonesia. In the 1990s, Timor-Leste was part of Indonesia, and integrated as its 27th region, even if this situation was challenged. A second aspect that may be advanced is that these works seem to contain an active political message. We can discern from the nationality of its makers that their content was one of resistance against the New Order regime of General Suharto (1967-1998).

Yet, when looking at the works, the first noticeable aspect is their materiality, one that is linked to the presence of traditional arts. Still, traditional arts in these two installations are not framed in the usual way, as showcased within ethnographic museums (a way that removes them from their social and ritual contexts), or even in propagandistic tourist shows (in which they are transformed into stable creations). In this case, traditional arts are equally removed from their context, but they are employed within installation art, a medium most commonly associated with contemporary art practices. So, as in ethnographic or tourist contexts, here the material presence of traditional arts does not refer to the wholeness of traditional arts but rather is presented in a fragmented way.

On Harsono's work Javanese *wayang topeng*[1] masks are visible, but the masks are severed under the nose. The artist displayed the two halves, voice and sight, in separate sections of the installation, and on top of a square black cloth. On Madeira's work a traditional woven cloth covers what looks like a bed incrusted with nails. In both works the presence of ready-made aesthetics and little hand interference is undeniable. Yet it is also possible to grasp the artist's intention to perform conceptually a clear message of dissent. But it is not possible to have direct access to it. This is where curatorial practices of contextualization come in, as modes of conveying hidden (political) messages: curators inform (the public) about the context of the works' production. This way, audiences, both local and international, are addressed. Nevertheless, these two audiences – local and international – many times understand the works in opposing ways: while those that are familiar with the discourse of conceptual art and unfamiliar with

1. "Wayang topeng", or mask "wayang" is commonly used in performances that retell the Javanese tale of the Panji prince. During Suharto's regime, the symbol of the Panji Prince was instrumentalized: while the Panji himself is a symbol of good character and etiquette, during the New Order it was made to enforce good behavior on Indonesian populations.

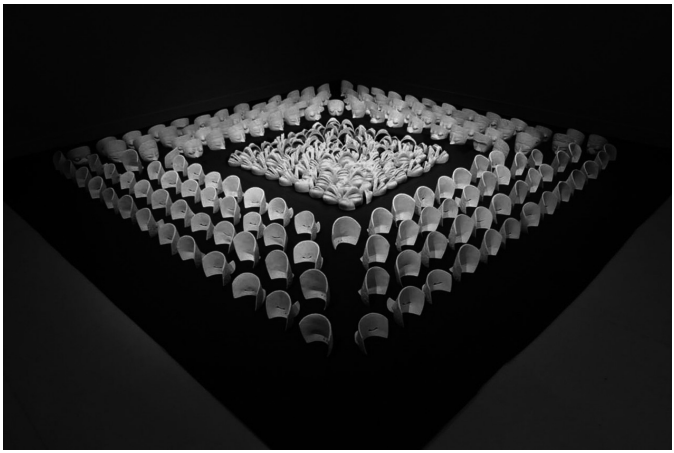

Fig. 1 · "The Voices are Controlled by the Powers", FX Harsono
1994. Mixed media (100 wayang "topeng" masks, cloth)
30×350×350 cm, Image courtesy of the artist
Fig. 2 · "Silence at What Price?", Maria Madeira
1996. Mixed media with "tais".
200×100×30 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

wayang topeng or *ikat*,[2] will relate more to the analytical language used by conceptual artists and grasp that traditional art was employed conceptually, people who are less familiar with these discourses may only recognize the mask or the cloth. Thus, the potential audience of these works seems transversal, but this contact largely depends on exposure, an aspect that relates to exhibitionary practices and in turn, visibility.

1. Context: the 1990s in Indonesia and Timor-Leste

During the 1990s, various artists from Southeast Asia made visual work addressing violations and human rights abuses by totalitarian regimes they were immersed in. This aspect was highly present in artistic practices from Indonesia, a country that was living an extremely depoliticized era under Suharto. In Timor-Leste the same protesting element existed in art, but it was practically confined to wall art practices, which was then the most used art form to express the desire for freedom (see Barrkman and Conceição Silva, 2008).

As proposed by Indian curator Geeta Kapur, difficult political circumstances are crucial for the emergence of an avant-garde. She affirms this as a condition for avant-garde's emergence: "avant-garde can only be situated in a moment of real historical or political disjuncture [and] Therefore, it will appear in various forms in different parts if the world at different times."(Kapur, 1996, p. 67) This aspect relates to the avant-garde's *mission* of producing a different future: avant-garde surges in moments of consternation such as the New Order regime. So, avant-garde's radical gestures can be regarded as acts of social agency, as forms of resistance toward increasingly repressive politics.

In some cases, artists created these works from exile. This is the situation of Maria Madeira (b. 1968, Gleno), who worked from Australia, where she (probably) had more media coverage of the situation in her home country. During the occupation period, between 1975 and 1998, the military forces of the New Order perpetrated several criminal offenses toward the population of Timor-Leste. And because she resided outside of the country, Madeira's inclination toward foreign audiences was instinctive, and one that derived from the urge to preserve "a culture that was being destroyed and dismantled through genocide." (Madeira, 2011a) Through her work, she called for help. The 1996 installation, entitled *Silence at What Price?* alludes to a tragic episode, relating to the manner the

2. In Timor-Leste, "ikat" weaving is named "tais", a designation common in the region of Lesser Sunda, in Indonesia. This resist-dye woven cloth is used on several occasions – from daily life to ceremonies – and has been considered the country's national textile after independence. Its importance is highly felt, as the woven drawings tell the stories of the ancestors and legends of the island of Timor.

Timorese student Fernando Boavida (a member of the youth resistance), was tortured at the hands of the Indonesian military while being interrogated:

> During his interrogation, he was made to lie on a plank of sharp nails, while another plank was laid on top of him. A heavy tire was placed on top of the second plank. When Fernando failed to give his torturers 'satisfactory answers', another tire was added. Fernando lost consciousness and died, three days after his arrest. (Amnesty International to United Nations, 13/7/1993) (Madeira, 2011b)

In this work, Fernando was represented by a full length piece of *tais*, in a direct correlation to some ceremonial funerary rituals from Timor-Leste, in which a full *tais* length is placed on top of the coffin of the person to be buried. (Ximenes, 2012, pp. 11–12)

Without knowledge of Madeira's plight, Harsono, in Indonesia, was fighting the same repression. His installation *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* indicates lack of free speech and a policed environment. This installation was made after the government ban of TEMPO magazine, after it exposed some corruption scandals (Masters, 2013, p. 120).

While both works are highly political, I propose what is of primordial relevance is that they conveyed political messages *through* the employment of traditional arts. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the reading of these practices as political art and expand their interpretation toward defining a local variant of avant-garde.

2. What does avant-garde signify? And how does avant-garde emerge?

Australian art historian John Clark's affirms that "Rather than ask what is avant-garde, it may be better to inquire into where avant-garde functions take place." (Clark, 1998, p. 217) But what is an avant-garde function? Can avant-garde be considered a function? In 1939, the renowned art critic Clement Greenberg who proposed avant-garde as a *historical agency* – a genealogy that I follow (see Greenberg, 1939). This concept was recovered in 1984 by the Belgian filmmaker Paul Willemen when he proposed "An Avant-garde for the eighties," (Willemen, 1984) and applauded by Indian theorists, namely Kapur and Partha Mitter, who considers this one a 'fresh' definition (Kapur, 1996; Mitter, 2008, p. 534). This proposal is useful as it corresponds to the notion of avant-garde as a discourse remaining outside the discourses of style that have characterized art historical narratives. Instead, avant-garde should be regarded as a *force* (Foster, 1996, p. 26), imbued with a conscience of its own time (Willemen, 1984), that after electing its contemporary *language* and *mission* (Coutinho, 2015, pp. 3–4), propels a change in the course of art history.

In 1996, on the occasion of the influential exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, in the Asia Society in New York, Kapur announced the mission of what I came to term the 'Third Avant-garde':

> In order for an African or Asian avant-garde to come to its own, it must take at least two moves simultaneously: one, dismantle hegemonic and by-now-conservative features of the national culture itself; and two, dismantle the burdensome aspect of Western art, including its endemic vanguardism. (Kapur, 1996)

Kapur formulated the artists' contribution for change: a *double-dismantle* against internal and external forces. This is what the Third Avant-garde performs. There were (and still are) several forces at play; on the one hand, internal forces such as repressive politics, an unprepared audience, and an uncritical embracement of the normative features of Western modernism within academic circuits. On the other hand, there were external forces, especially relating to a growing international exposure. Brasilian art historian Ana Letícia Fialho remembers:

> The determinants of this opening are multiple… But the most important factor to be considered is certainly the increasing demand for 'novelties' by the markets… saturated of Western modernity and great European masters, provoking then the 'discovery' of the arts from other regions. (Fialho, 2005, p. 692)

According to Fialho, in the 1990s, the art world was dominated by a political correctness which led to two possible manifestations: one, that she called "the discourse of assimilation, in which the national element must disappear, where only […] universal elements are valid."(Fialho, 2005, p. 691) The curators that adhered to this international discourse aimed to demonstrate that "good art has no frontiers." The second version was the "discourse of difference [which] is based on the affirmation of national, regional or local characteristics, multiculturalism and even exoticism." (Fialho, 2005, p. 692)

These contradictions were highly felt, and to overcome the situation, some Western curators, namely Australian Caroline Turner for the Asia-Pacific Triennial in Queensland, Australia, opted to work collaboratively with local curators from each Asian country. Still, the major problem was how to negotiate *traditional arts* which were highly present in the artworks, since, as Cuban art historian Gerardo Mosquera observed, "Many artists, critics and (Latin American) curators seem to be quite willing to become 'othered' for the West." (Mosquera, 2005, p. 220)

From this, gradually the way to frame and theorize these practices changed: since the 2000s, curators and art historians, namely Turner and Chiu proposed

these practices as political art made in a repressive context. Writing in 2005, Turner would say: "Indonesian artists … have over the past decade produced a powerful body of work opposing human rights abuses in their country, and have often faced personal danger in so doing." (Turner, 2005, p. 9) And while this is correct, it does not make the materiality of local aspects – traditions in the form of ready-made and found objects – evident. Yet, explaining these practices as political art legitimized them as bound to the context of emergence (an extremely repressive one), and would simultaneously allow the artists to escape the accusation of doing work to reconcile the expectations of a Western audience whiling to consume ethnicity.

In 2010, American art historian Amanda Katherine Rath went a step further, framing these practices as "Contextual Art", a very useful designation. Their primary aim "was to develop a means by which artistic practice could be a sphere of dialogic representation and communication." (Rath, 2010, p. 4) So, she explains, "a contextual work should be able to bring across awareness about the plight of society and their suffering through aesthetic means." Contextual art, Rath affirms, "demands [that] the artist possess knowledge of both the local social and political problems, and the visual symbols and materials of that area as well." In fact, all Third Avant-garde artists are contextual artists, who articulate the knowledge of local codes, including traditional ones. Yet, what is most relevant is the combination they make *with* the conceptual language of fine art.

In 2011, the Australian art historian Terry Smith designated these art practices that merge art and traditional arts as a 'second current of contemporary art' which he named "The Postcolonial Turn", one that prevails in former colonies and on the edges of Europe (Smith, 2011, pp. 10–11). According to him, this current stems from the after-effects of postcolonialism and is "to diverse, uneven, contradictory, and oppositional to amount to an art movement." (Smith, 2011, pp. 10–11) He acknowledges that these practices "often evoke traditional imagery, but also register the new" and proposes that this "content-driven art [is] concerned above all with issues of nationality, identity and rights." (Smith, 2011, p. 11)

After Smith's definition of the postcolonial turn, in 2013 the publication *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, the German art historians Peter Weibel and Hans Belting labeled these practices as 'Global Art', a current within the contemporary. (Buddensieg and Belting, 2013) They posit the emergence of 'new' players within the contemporary, and observe their active replacement of "colonial history of world art." (Buddensieg and Belting, 2013, p. 29) Yet, defining these players as 'new' and placing their practices under the banner of the global does not seem appropriate because not only, these civilizations have histories of contributions and their practices are in fact extremely localized.

3. A new reading: the Third Avant-garde

What I term 'Third Avant-garde' does not allude to a practice from the 'Third World' (a nomenclature no longer used); instead it refers to certain contemporary practices, which incorporate the three criteria defined by Terry Smith to define a contemporary art work: firstly, they are contemporaneous, which means they have been produced since the 1980s up until today; secondly for their contemporaneousness, mirrored in their relation with everyday life; and thirdly, for their cotemporality, which is manifest in the "coexistence if distinct temporalities, of different ways of being in relation to time."(Smith, 2009) The coevality of past and present, traditional and modern, urban and rural, historical and contemporary is what makes the Third Avant-garde works so relevant for the discourses of the contemporary.

The phenomenon of the Third Avant-garde took place in Southeast Asia, most notably in the 1990s, although the initial premises can be traced back to the mid-1970s, when student movements proliferated in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia (See Flores, 2011). This mode of making laid the foundations for a mode of art making that endures to this day. It meets the fundamental premises of the avant-garde, as defined by German art historian Peter Bürger — anti-institutionalism, the liaison with real life, and the blurring of high and low cultures (Bürger, 1984). What I am terming Third Avant-garde works have as their most striking feature the *presence of fragments of tradition*. This apparent anachronism makes the viewer oscillate between different temporalities, past and present, modern and traditional. And as a result of these practices, several inherited classifications, namely art and ethnography, are being reappraised, especially through the recent rebranding of Western ethnographic museums into world art museums (Clifford, 2014).

Third Avant-garde practices originate mainly from three premises: *material*, *method* and *motivation*.

The *materiality* of the Third Avant-garde is defined by the (re)appropriation[3] of material culture from traditional cultures that remained confined to the discourses of ethnography, an aspect that is especially significant for Southeast Asian cultures. The Third Avant-garde draws more precisely on *fragments of tradition* (Poshyananda, 1996, p. 29). FX Harsono did not represent the whole Panji tale; the mask itself is enough to convey the idea he aims to transmit. Similarly,

3. Generally, 'appropriation' is understood as an illegitimate borrowing, of taking into one's reality something that is not one's own. 'Reappropriation' manifests when an object outside of art's realm enters the discourse of art. This is a problematic distinction for the specific case of traditional arts, since it perpetuates the divide between art and ethnography.

Maria Madeira did not represent the incident; she used installations' allegorical capacities (Kapur, 1996, p. 64) to convey her own vision of the violence perpetrated against the Timorese resistance.

It must be remembered that in the context of modern nations, traditions are largely 'invented.'(Hobsbawm, 1983) In most cases, these invented traditions are imposed by an elite, established rapidly, and make use of selected ancient materials – fragments of traditions – for novel purposes, such as tourism. When a Third Avant-garde artist uses a *fragment* – like the mask in Harsono, or the piece of *tais* in Madeira – he is not celebrating the national narrative, but rather addressing its invented character. In addition, Third Avant-garde artists in the 1990s were not using traditional arts or celebrating a return to hand making, as their postmodern peers. On contrary, the Third Avant-garde also fights against the uncritical look on tradition by postmodern art.

In 1996, Apinan Poshyananda, curator of the seminal show *Traditions/ Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, in the Asia Society, in New York, warned that traditions were being *reprocessed* (Kapur, 1996[4]):

> Artists who live in Asian countries with complex and multilayered cultures are fully aware of the burden of negative traditions that might be associated with their works. The persistence of stereotypes means that any of these artists may be prejudged on the basis of his or her nationality, race, or religion. But artists such as … Heri Dono [and] FX Harsono … are not primarily concerned with self-reflection. Instead, they attempt to reveal the complexity of contemporary Asia through the revival or resurrection of traditional forms. But, again, they do not simply restage the past as a consensual process of invention of tradition. Rather their works include fragments of tradition that serve to question nationalistic aesthetics and bigotry. (Poshyananda, 1996, p. 29)

In terms of its *method*, the Third Avant-garde continues certain procedures such as the ready-made, the decontextualisation of objects, and montage: all these techniques and tactics were useful for the transmission of messages to the audience. Avant-garde has a fondness for the scandalous, but this novel mode of acting, which employs fragments from traditional arts, explains why works conveying brutal messages of discontent by artists such as Madeira and Harsono do not immediately provoke sentiments of hatred in the audience: the message is delivered in a sharp and disruptive yet remarkably subtle and multi-meaning way.

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4. Kapur explains that whenever traditions are reworked, this constitutes an act of invention as much as of self-subversion.

What is the *motivation* behind these confronting, yet subtle works? It appears, it is not solely identity. It is true that these artworks were practically only visible outside their home countries, because they were included in international shows that started appearing in the early 1990s. This circumstance is what Indonesian curator Jim Supangkat refers to as "contemporary art in exile." (Supangkat, 2016) When looking at the materiality of these practices – the *wayang* for Harsono and the *tais* for Madeira – indeed something about the artists' identity and origin can be learned. This is an important aspect – the artist's articulation of very old cultural dispositions to convey his reality. Since most contemporary artists reside in various places – sometimes they are exiled (such as Vietnamese-American Dinh Q. Lê), sometimes they move to study (the case of Indonesian artists Nindityo Adipurnomo and Ninus Anusapati), and other times their careers are so international that they become globe-trotters (like Indonesian artist Arahmaiani) – their identities change, and become more complex (Chiu, 2011[5]). So, in order to communicate to their peers (which then become not solely local but global), these artists produce, through these conflated practices, acts of *social agency* like the ones shown.

4. The deferred temporality of the Third Avant-garde

Like other avant-gardes, The Third Avant-garde of the 1990s also experienced through the *phenomenon of deferred temporality,* "the dialogical space-time of avant-garde practice and institutional reception." (Foster, 1994, p. 11) This has had negative consequences; the accommodation of these artistic practices within art historical discourses remains unfinished, and thus, their full integration inside museums is deferred.

During the 1990s, *tradition* was effectively a topic of research, particularly visible in exhibition practices throughout the world. Important examples are the third Havana Biennial, *Tradition and Contemporaneity* in 1989; the first Asia Pacific Triennial of Queensland, *Tradition and Change* in 1993; and the exhibition *Traditions/Tensions* in New York, in 1996. The topic had theoretical currency, but after these shows it was practically abandoned by curators and museums.

In this sense, it can be said that artists were more successful than the curators; their works continued to feature the growing network of biennials that boomed since the 1990s. The *Flying Angels* installation by Heri Dono [Fig. 3], an ongoing series that he started producing in 1995, can be taken as an example. (Eastburn, n.d.)

5. Chen Zhen refers to this circumstance as "transexperience". See (Chiu, 2011)

Fig. 3 · "Flying Angels", Heri Dono
1995 – present. Mixed media ("wayang" topeng, electronic devices)
Dimensions variable. Image by Leonor Veiga

In this seminal work, Heri Dono expressed his desire for more freedom by using the exact same codes as those from the state sponsored art of shadow theaters from Java. As American art historian Astri Wright observed,

> The Indonesian government invests in the past and encourages traditional forms of art in order to counter new ones. So he decided to exploit the situation, expressing his own thoughts without really spelling them out. Even in the past the *wayang* has often been used as a means for indirect and allusive suggestion, which is important in Javanese communication and social intercourse. (Wrigth quoted in Simone et al., 2014, p. 52)

Because of all these nuances, this work came to represent the country's situation and the artistic creativity of the artist. It is probably the most international work from Southeast Asia ever: exhibited for the first time in the 1996 São Paulo Biennial, Dono's angels have travelled the world, and different editions are housed in disparate locations such as Singapore Art Museum and the National Gallery of Australia.

5. Recent considerations

In 2012, the Pilipino art historian Patrick Flores revisited the topic of tradition in the essay 'Revisiting Tradition and the Incommensurate Contemporary' (Flores, 2012). Here, he looked at the way tradition, as a Southeast Asian ingredient, was framed within curatorial practices.[6] Flores analysed the manner in which tradition was framed within the three initial *Asia-Pacific Triennials* (APT) and *Traditions/Tensions*. In his regard, within APT, tradition was viewed uncritically, either signifying the "great civilisations" of the past, and linked to the lower traditions of folk, or simply as denoting the national. In a way, he accuses the APT of persisting in inherited colonial discourses (such as the analysis by French art historian George Coedès, in 1968[7]) that have been appropriated by the nation states and integrated in national narratives. In *Traditions/Tensions*, on the other hand, Flores noted that the topic was treated differently, from within, demonstrating that the uneasiness of coevality resulted from the phenomenon of

6. Flores's analysis does not contain the Third Havana Biennial, because it is not representative of the region of Southeast Asia.

7. The origin of colonial discourses is commonly attributed to the continuous analysis of the region's art through the important publication by French scholar of Southeast Asian archaeology and history George Coedès, who wrote extensively in the early decades of the twentieth-century. His most important book, "The Indianized States of Southeast Asia", was first published in 1944.

multi-temporality that characterized Asian societies in the 1990s (which in some cases, remains ongoing).

These observations were corroborated by Australian art historian Pat Hoffie in 2014, who affirmed that the curatorial team of APT, regarded traditions as cultural products from the region, and viewed them statically. She also noted that the employment of indigenous materials and themes in the work of some Pilipino artists dated to the 1980s, and that this persistence through the 1990s constituted a form of "resistance" (Hoffie, 2014). This is an important aspect, and it leads to my own definition of these artworks as avant-garde. By looking at these practices as stemming from a politics of resistance, it is possible to frame them in a way beyond the much propagated ideas of cultural hybridism, as advocated by Indian cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), as a manifestation of syncretism, as defined by British art historian Jean Fisher (Fisher, 2005), or as political art, as proposed by Turner and Chiu.

In sum, this leads to Argentinian-born anthropologist Nestor García Canclini's affirmation:

> To be cultured... is not so much to connect oneself with a repertoire of exclusively modern objects and messages but to know how to incorporate the avant-garde, as well as technological advances, into traditional patterns. (Canclini, 1996, p. 28)

Despite all curatorial practices showcased, and all theorization produced, an art historical placement for those artworks that combine traditional arts with the analytical discourse of the contemporary remains *in process*. And, as a result, their institutionalization remains deferred.

6. Conclusion

The two Southeast Asian artists debated – FX Harsono and Maria Madeira – are significant and may represent the realm of contemporary art practices that use traditional arts made in a context of repression. This tendency, as affirmed, results from various factors: firstly, political factors, as both artists lived under a repressive regime. While Harsono belong to the dominant country, Madeira belonged to the occupied nation. Secondly, identity factors: both artists lived in a world still dominated by Western paradigm. Thus, traditional arts were used as a form of resistance against this hegemony. Simultaneously, they refused to accept that 'traditional arts' remained confined to the discourses of ethnography, by elevating them to the realm of fine art. Thirdly, artistic factors: both artists felt the need to express their views in a manner that would not follow the premises of

Western art, and simultaneously resisted the nationalistic agenda that 'invented traditions'. Thus, they used traditional arts *conceptually*, and in doing so, created a completely new form of making art (that endures).

Behind the aforementioned characteristics resides the nomenclature 'Third Avant-garde', as a practice that responds, not only to a contextual disruptive situation, but also meets Bürger's avant-garde criteria – anti-institutionalism, the liaison with real life and the blurring of high and low cultures – and do so *through* traditional arts.

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